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Japanese
Buddhism

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JAPANESE BUDDHISM.

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THE growth of Buddhism after the death of its founder was rapid. Very soon after his first sermon Buddha sent out sixty converts with this commission: "I am delivered from all fetters human and divine. You, too, O monks, are delivered from the same fetters. Go forth and wander everywhere, out of compassion for the world, and for the welfare of gods and men. Go forth, one by one, in different directions. Preach the doctrine in its beginning, its middle and its end, in its spirit and in its letter. Proclaim a life of perfect restraint, chastity and celibacy. I will go also and preach this doctrine." Buddhism was from the beginning, therefore, and has been more or less throughout its history a missionary faith. For this reason the new way of salvation became known before many centuries in regions beyond the land of its birth,—Ceylon, Siam,

Burma, Anam and the islands of the South ; also Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, China, Korea and Japan in the course of time accepted the new faith, and Buddhism became the great religion of Asia. Curiously enough, however, it could not retain its ground in India, the land of its nativity. There Brahmanism reasserted itself, though not without becoming materially modified through its contact with Buddhism, partly owing to which it is now known under the new name of Hinduism. Another remarkable feature of the history of Buddhism has been its failure to displace certain native religions with which it came in contact in other countries. In some instances it succeeded in gaining the control over only a part of the territory, so to speak, of man's spiritual nature. In China, for example, it holds the ground conjointly with Confucianism and Taoism in such a way that most Chinese are Confucianists, Taoists and Buddhists at the same time. A similar state of affairs prevails in Japan and Korea. For this reason

there is great divergence in the estimates made of the strength of Buddhism, Rhys Davids, for instance, making the number of Buddhists in Asia about 500 millions, while Monier-Williams puts the figure at only 100 millions. The discrepancy is produced by counting, or refusing to count, people who belong to other faiths at the same time.

Hand in hand with the growth of Buddhism, however, went a profound change in its character. Primitive Buddhism was an atheistic humanitarianism, being without a God, without a revelation, without priests, without temples, without sacrifices, without prayer, insisting on the baldest simplicity, the most rigorous self-denial, and the extremest negative purity, and aiming at the extinction of personal existence. The Buddhism of to-day, while existing in Protean forms, is a cult that can nevertheless be generally characterized as an idolatrous polytheism with theistic tendencies. It has been an approach toward, rather than a movement away from, the true conception of a

religion. Buddha is worshipped as a god, as are also many other beings, in the forms of numberless images. Both the historical and the legendary teachings of Buddha and of his early followers are held in abjectest reverence as being divine revelations. Vast hordes of priests perform the rites and ceremonies of an elaborate sacerdotalism in thousands of gorgeously built temples, making offerings and chanting prayers for the living and the dead. The glitter and pomp of hierarchy impress the vulgar mind. A great show of ascetic self-denial is but an ostentatious form devoid of reality. Ideas of purity are relegated to a secondary place. A paradise as sensual as that of the Mohammedans is held before the devotees, and Nirvana is transformed from a state of non-existence into a condition of hazy, dream-like beatitude. Why this change? Why this recoil to many of the features of the Brahmanism from which Buddhism sprang and against which it was a reaction and a protest? Because Buddhism ran counter to the eternal

instincts of the human heart. Man craves for home and property, for the presence and protection of a divine being—for life, in short, with all that helps to make it worth living, rather than for death and the emptiness of total extinction. And Buddhism with all the elaborateness of its programme for humanity found itself driven to pay its humblest respects to these human cravings.

As early as 337 B. C. a great schism occurred, out of which grew the two great divisions, variously known as Northern Buddhism and Southern Buddhism, or the Greater Vehicle and the Lesser Vehicle, or Mahayana and Hinayana. These main divisions exist until this day, the Southern type of the faith being found in Ceylon, Siam, Burma, Anam and Java; the Northern in Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan. Of Northern Buddhism the sacred literature is in Sanskrit; Southern Buddhism retained the original Pali. Southern Buddhism is the simpler, the more nearly like the original form of the faith;

Northern Buddhism is such a confused mass of modifications and accretions as would probably make it unrecognizable to the founder were he somehow to reappear upon the scene. Other schisms followed this great one. Divisions and subdivisions occurred, the differences hinging largely on the question of a less or greater divergence from the simplicity of the early form of the faith. Generally the side of greater divergence gained the day. Modification followed modification, every new development being supported by the continuous weaving of new legends, or by new and one-sided emphasis upon some particular portion of Buddha's doctrine. Religions of the lands which Buddhism entered, like the Shamanism of Tibet and the Shintoism of Japan, were taken up into it and assimilated. New deities were added; image worship increased; temples, pagodas, relics and charms were multiplied, until Buddhism became what it now is—the most elaborate system of idolatry in the world.

To all this Japanese Buddhism is

no exception. The year 552, A. D., is generally agreed upon as the year in which Buddhism was brought to Japan. What was Japan when Buddhism knocked at its doors? This is an important question, for the successful entrance of a religion into a new country depends very much on the religious, social, political and intellectual condition of the people to be won. Let us attempt a hurried answer. The population at the time consisted possibly of one million people—hunters, fishermen and farmers, divided up into many different clans. There was a dominant tribe whose head, called Mikado, exercised authority over a considerable portion of the main island, and there were already the beginnings of government, law and literature. The people were intellectually well gifted. Their latent æsthetic endowments later proved to be of a high order. The prevailing religion was Shinto, or the Way of the Gods. It was a cult whose soul was reverence and obedience toward the Mikado, combined with the worship of

ancestors and of nature. It identified patriotism with religious devotion. It fostered the *Yamato Damashii*, that is, the spirit of Japan. It thus became a useful engine for the conquest, unification and civilization of the outlying tribes. It looked upon Japan as the sacred land of the gods, and it peopled its mountains, trees, rivers and clouds with deities innumerable. But it was then already an unsatisfactory religion. Before the real religious cravings of the soul it was dumb. The rising tide of civilization demanded something better, and altogether Japan was, for the new and more elaborate faith of Buddhism, an inviting field.

Buddhism came in by way of Korea. The story runs as follows: In the year 552, A. D., a Korean king sent over to the court of Japan some golden images of Buddha; together with some sacred books. The Mikado called a council to determine what should be done with the idols. The majority feared that the worship of these foreign gods would be a dangerous insult to

the native ones, and decided to have nothing to do with them. However, one of the Ministers of State set up the images in his country residence, which he thus converted into the first Buddhist temple in Japan. Soon after, the land was afflicted with a grievous pestilence, and this was attributed to the wrath of the native gods incurred by the harboring of these new rivals. War broke out, the temple was burned, and the idols thrown into a river. Whereupon still greater calamities followed, seeming to indicate that Heaven was after all on the side of the new gods. Then the tide turned. Priests and missionaries were invited over from Korea in large numbers. Later, emissaries came also from China, and still later Japanese monks went over to China to drink at what was considered more nearly the fountain of the new faith. The emperors became patrons of Buddhism and helped to build great temples and monasteries. Still questionings as to the temper of the native deities occasioned some uneasiness, until early in the ninth century the great

Kobo arose, who did successfully for Buddhism what Philo unsuccessfully attempted between Judaism and Platonism. He brought the two together through the supernatural discovery that all the Shinto deities were incarnations of Buddha, and, therefore, belonged to the Buddhist pantheon. The only thing that remained to be done was to re-christen the native deities with Buddhist names, and to give them due recognition as members of the already greatly overgrown family of Buddhist divinities. The scheme was a success. Temples acquired a mixed character, partly Buddhist and partly Shinto. Upon the family god-shelf sat cheek by jowl Buddhist and Shinto idols dispensing supposed favors to their happy devotees with equal alacrity. This *Ryobu*, or mixed Buddhism, lived in Japan for a thousand years. Out of the trunk of this mixture of the cult grew, however, about the thirteenth century, several new shoots, which together soon exceeded the parent trunk both in size and vigor. But the old and the new flourished

together until the year 1870, when a crash came. The revived spirit of nationalism led the country to a consciousness of the wrong done not only to the old native faith, but much more to the government, by retiring the emperors to lives of sacred and harmless seclusion, leaving the actual control of affairs for many centuries to those most capable of seizing it. The day of retribution was severe. Buddhism was disestablished. The priests were left to find their own rice. The *Ryobu*, or mixed temples, were purged of all Buddhist idols, as well as of every vestige of Buddhist furniture, decoration or symbolism. A strong and persistent effort was made to revive Shinto, and the effort was so far successful that this religion holds a place of comparative importance even now, owing, indeed, largely to the fact that it is the religion of the imperial household. And yet, in spite of all, the religion which dominates Japan to-day is Buddhism.

So much by way of a brief glance at the external history of Buddhism

in general and of Japanese Buddhism in particular. Turning now to the inner development of the cult in Japan, its present condition and its effects upon the people of the Empire of the Rising Sun, we find much that is interesting.

The inner history of Japanese Buddhism is interesting, not only on its own account, but especially through the light which it throws upon the religious structure and tendencies of the Japanese mind. For in the history of a religion in any country there is always a process of interaction between the forces represented by the religion itself and the forces of the national life, and sometimes the religion is modified as much as it modifies. The history of Buddhism in Japan is a history of sects. These sects represent all sorts of one-sided emphasis, on one or the other element of the Buddhist teachings, all sorts of deviations from these teachings, all sorts of foreign ideas superadded to, or substituted for, the original teachings. As has been said, it is the Northern type of Buddhism that prevails in

Japan. However, the Southern, or Hinayana, type was not without its trial here. Early in the history of the introduction of the new religion three sects of the Lesser Vehicle found their way into the country and gained a considerable following. But they have long since ceased to be. The Japanese mind was not sufficiently lethargic and listless to offer a permanent welcome to a form of teaching so utterly negative and hopeless. Later came two sects that occupied a middle ground between the extremes of Northern and Southern Buddhism. But even of these the one has already died out, while the other, though still living, is doing so at a dying rate.

The sects that have held their ground are those distinctively representing the Greater Vehicle. Of these there are seven in Japan to-day (not counting sub-sects), four of them having been imported, the other three being native to the soil. Of the four imported ones three are of Indian origin, while one is a native of China; all, however,

entered Japan through China. The general characteristics of these four are that they came in a more concrete form than their predecessors, and were thus better fitted to appeal to the ordinary mind. They came beating drums and flaunting colors. They set up their numerous idols and welcomed the native deities into the crowd. They performed rites and ceremonies. They paraded the pomp of hierarchy. They sold charms and amulets. Instead of the dry husks of abstraction they interested the people in saints, sacred places and relics. Instead of austerities in this life they offered them prosperity and health; and instead of the nihilism of Nirvana in the hereafter, they depicted to them a paradise sufficiently sensuous to meet their liveliest appreciation. As to peculiarities distinguishing the individual sects, one, the Kegon, is noted for its very close resemblance doctrinally and practically to Brahmanism. Another, the Tendai, through the profundity of its speculations, on the one hand, has earned the name

of the metaphysical sect, while on the other, by its wily practical methods, it has drawn upon itself the epithet of the Jesuits of Buddhism. The Shingon sect consummated the absorption of the Shinto deities into the Buddhist pantheon, and in doctrine is largely a reproduction of the ancient Yoga philosophy of Brahmanism, one of the most interesting phenomena of the intellectual and religious life of India, and the main philosophical basis of the modern phenomenon of theosophy. Still another, the Zen sect, may be denominated the Quaker sect, both on account of its pronounced mysticism and of its opposition to an excessive use of idols, sacred books, ceremonies and religious externals in general.

Most important for our study, however, are the three sects that are native to Japan, namely, the Jodo, the Shin and the Nichiren sects. These three sects arose during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when Japanese Buddhism was approaching the zenith of its glory. Their rise forms an epoch in the history of

Japanese Buddhism. Three strikingly new things manifest themselves in connection with them, namely, first, emphasis upon paradise as practically the goal of human striving; secondly, the idea of salvation by faith; and, thirdly, an approach to the theistic conception. An opposite tendency, however, also manifested itself in a doctrine of the Nichiren sect resembling somewhat the modern theory of atheistic evolution.

The first of the sects named, the Jodo, is based upon the teaching of the Indian philosopher Memio. But as a religious sect it originated in Japan. This was the first Buddhist sect to announce the doctrine of paradise, or heaven, and of salvation by faith, though it did so in a rather negative way. Owing to a conviction that men were no longer as earnest in matters of religion as formerly, and that thus few would attain to Nirvana according to the noble eight-fold path of original Buddhism, it was decided to lower the standard, and to find, not "a more excellent," but an easier way.

This lower standard or goal was paradise, or the Pure Land, where Amida, the deification of boundless light, dwells, and where the saved abide in supreme bliss. The easier way was that of faith in Amida. It was the first appearance in Buddhism of the principle of salvation through the aid of another. Faith in Amida secures from him the compassionate help which man's weakness needs in order to reach paradise. According to the Jodo doctrine, however, this faith was to be supplemented by works. The works consist of the acquisition of merit, mainly by the endless repetition of the formula, "*Namu Amida Butsu*," or "Hail Eternal Buddha!" The founder of the sect himself is said to have repeated the formula sixty thousand times a day, and to-day priests in the temples, farmers and mechanics at their toil, wives at their needles and old men and women taking care of their grandchildren keep up an incessant hum of *Namu Amida Butsu*, *Namu Amida Butsu*.

But while the Jodo sect thus

halted at the position of faith and works, it was not long before a new sect arose which planted itself squarely upon the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. This was the Shin, or True, sect, which sect represents the crowning manifestation of Buddhism in Japan. The sect is a sort of Protestantism in relation to the older sects, and its founder, Shinran, is a sort of a Luther. The soteriological views of Buddhism experienced a revolution. Amida, the object of the faith upon which this and the previous sects built, is a Buddha-to-be according to most scriptures, according to some a Buddha already. Practically, among the adherents of the Jodo and the Shin sects he has transplanted the original Buddha, and occupies the highest place in their pantheon. "In preparation for his office as the saviour of men (I quote from Nanjo's 'Short History of the Twelve Buddhist Sects'), he practised good deeds during many periods of transmigration, with the purpose of bringing his stock of merits to maturity for the sake of other living

beings. All his actions, words and thoughts were always pure and true, so that he achieved the fulfilment of his great compassionate desire." And he uttered what is known as the Original Vow, as follows: "If any of the living beings of the ten regions, who have believed in me with true thoughts and the desire to be born into my country and have even to ten times repeated the thought of my name, should not be born there, then may I not obtain the perfect knowledge." This practice and this vow, it is said, gave to Amida an excellence surpassing that of all other Buddhas, and made him immeasurable light as well as boundless wisdom and compassion, the saviour of all who turn to him. "To rely upon the power of the Original Vow of Amida," to quote again from Nanjo, "with the whole heart and give up all idea of self-power is called the truth." This reliance upon the all-merciful Amida was proclaimed by Shinran as the sole means of immediate and full salvation, in opposition to the synergism of the

Jodo sect. Not antinomian, however, was the new doctrine. Good works were to be done, and they did not consist in the mere senseless repetition of formulas. It is the glory of the Shin sect that in its emphasis upon common morality it exceeds every other sect. And the motive is not, as in the case of the Jodo sect, the acquisition of merit, but the view is that purity of morals is only a necessary proof of the faith in Amida. It is not a meaningless coincidence that this view of salvation by faith and of the necessity of purity of life led Shinran, the founder of the new Buddhism, as it did Luther, the reformer, three hundred years later, to reject the practice of celibacy. Shinran married a lady of the imperial court.

Like Luther, moreover, Shinran together with his disciples, translated the most important of the sacred scriptures of Northern Buddhism, hitherto existing only in Sanskrit and Chinese, into the vernacular of the people, and had them printed in the simplest form. He also in-

augurated the practice of preaching to the people. He gave to women access to paradise, or the Pure Land, without being first re-born as men. Idols, relics and charms, cloisters, pilgrimages and ascetic austerities were to a large extent discarded. The temples of the new sect were located right among the people, along the principal streets in the heart of cities and towns, so as to be easily accessible to all.

Much can be said in criticism of this great phenomenon in the history of Japanese Buddhism, resembling Protestant Christianity, as it does, so closely in its external features that the former might be called a caricature of the latter had not the Shin sect been in existence three centuries before Protestantism. It is true, for example, that Amida, the all-merciful Saviour of Buddhism, has no historical basis. He is not the original Buddha who was Gautama of India. He is a pure figment of the imagination created to satisfy a blindly groping religious instinct. Moreover, he is not a saviour from sin, but only a saviour

from suffering. If the soteriology of the Shin sect were efficient it would not be sufficient. It would not deliver from the guilt and power of sin. And while the doctrine of this new Buddhism is an approach to a theistic form of faith, it still falls far short. Amida is not the Creator, not the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent One, not the Absolute. He does not bear distinctly the marks of personality. He is spoken of as exercising the functions of a person, but the deeper teaching is that he is a thing or a condition.

Yet when all is said it still remains true that of all manifestations among the ethnic religions of the Orient the rise of the Shin sect is one of the most remarkable and one of the most hopeful. And the facts that the birthplace of this new development in the ancient faith of Buddhism is Japan, and that this sect has nearly as many adherents in Japan as all the other Buddhist sects put together, speak volumes for the religious future of this most interesting land of the Far East.

So long as human conditions are so varied and human tendencies so divergent as they are now, probably the division of religious believers into sects is inevitable. Japan did well in the origination of her first native sect, much better still in the origination of the second. But there was also material among her people for the origination of a third division which fell far below the first two in quality. This was the Nichiren sect, or the Sect of the Sun Lotus. It is a sect of extremists and fanatics. Of all the other Buddhist sects none is so nationalistic, none so polytheistic, none so idolatrous, none so bigoted, none so controversial and fiery as this one. Its political motto is: "Japan for the Japanese." It includes in its catalogue of gods nearly every saint and hero of Japanese history. Its idols are the most numerous, various and hideous. It even worships its sutra, or sacred book, as a god, believing of course most devoutly in its verbal inspiration. The adherents of the sect regard themselves as the only

true sect; and certain of their priests warned the authorities of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago against all the other sects as false and as misrepresenting Buddhism. Their controversies with other sects have been marked by violence and unscrupulousness. A thousand years in the lowest hell is the reward prescribed by them for the priests of all other sects—surely a sad departure from the spirit of the gentle Buddha. So far as doctrine is concerned, they reject the principle of salvation by the aid of another, and insist that every man must work out his own salvation. Their description of paradise is most sensuous. Their chief dogma is an extension of the theory of transmigration to such an extent as to include every form of existence from the gods down to mud. The clod, no less than the man, is capable by means of successive re-births of becoming a Buddha—a sort of evolutionary process uncontrolled by design.

Thus it will be realized that the manifold ideas and practices which

have entered into the history of Japanese Buddhism constitute a grotesque compound. Certain elements, however, run through all the sects and throughout the whole history of the faith. Foremost among these is the doctrine of transmigration. Buddhism in all its forms rests unreservedly on this strange idea, the only variation consisting in the extent of its application. The universal acceptance accorded this theory in the Orient is something that to us is incomprehensible. Certain modern Japanese scholars have attempted to explain transmigration as nothing other than the doctrine of evolution. But between the two things there is a hopeless difference. The doctrine of transmigration is one of the things that helps to reveal the vast gulf between the Oriental and the Occidental mind.

Another principle that is coextensive with Buddhism is pantheism. Primitive Buddhism, indeed, was only indistinctly pantheistic, but the early reaction toward the Brahmanism from which Buddhism sprang, everywhere accorded to

pantheism again a large and avowed place. The idea of personality is nowhere clearly grasped. Men are phenomena, links in the chain of transmigration. The gods represent forces, or conditions, or principles, rather than distinct personal beings.

Another feature that is almost as general as the first two is the practice of religious contemplation. This is another of the strange phenomena of the Orient. It is of a piece with the pantheism of the East. The contemplation, or *dhyana* in Sanskrit, and *zen* in Japanese, connected with the religious life of the East is a mystic sinking of the individual mind into the great All, or rather, in Buddhism, into the great Nothing. The practice of it requires the subject to sit for long periods quite motionless, the legs, crossed in the manner shown in nearly every image or picture of Buddha, the hands in a certain position, and the body erect. The thoughts must be withdrawn from the things of sense and from definite conceptions, and fixed upon vacancy. Generally the results

aimed at are not definite truths that can be uttered in words, but rather a mental condition, a state of tranquility, an absolute imperturbability, an ecstatic quietude. In some forms of it, as in the case of the Zen, or contemplation sect, the aim was to secure by direct mystic transmission from Buddha certain secret revelations which gave an insight into the deepest truth. Often, however, it became what has been aptly called "mind-murder," ending in indolence and listlessness.

The pessimism which was so fundamental with original Buddhism still lives in all Japanese Buddhism, though in a weaker degree in the three native sects. Polytheism finds an extreme development. Idolatry, which was discarded by Buddha, is universal in Japanese Buddhism, restrained in some sects, rampant in others. The acquisition of merit occupies a large place in religious practice, but is spurned by the largest, that is, by the Shin sect. There is taught the doctrine of self-dependence and of salvation by dependence on others. There is

Universalism, Quakerism and Methodism. As to metaphysical principles, Japanese Buddhism furnishes examples of all sorts of manifestations—of absolute idealism and absolute nihilism; of a pantheism that would rival that of Spinoza and of realism that goes to the extreme of the French materialists. Its ethical thought, as was the case with original Buddhism, is controlled by both Stoic and Epicurean principles, though the fundamental ethical motive of Japan, as of the whole Orient, is endæmonistic. Amid all, however, must be remembered the fact that Japanese Buddhism answers much more nearly to the conception of a religion than its Indian original. In comparison with the latter it was in its best days not only a modification, but an elevation.

II. The present condition of Japanese Buddhism next claims attention. If in relation to its original the past of Japanese Buddhism was a modification and an elevation, its present condition must be called a modification and a

degeneration. The actual condition of Buddhism as it exists in Japan to-day is, indeed, in part a reflection of the past. It is the logical result of the mixture of heterogeneous forces which has already been referred to. Although in 1870 the government made a strenuous effort to disentangle Shinto, the primitive Japanese faith, from the Buddhism into which it had been taken up, the result, so far as the people at large were concerned, was far from successful. The people of Japan to-day are, with a small exception, adherents of three systems of teaching, namely, Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism. The demarkations between these three, in the minds of the common people, are far from distinct. Many of them worship deities and observe rites without knowing or caring whether they are of the Buddhist or Shinto kind. This confusion is well evidenced in the case of the little group of deities called "The Seven Gods of Happiness," whose images are to be found upon the god-shelf of almost every home ; whose names are upon

the lips of the people everywhere ; who are spoken of sometimes with reverence, often familiarly and even with merriment, in a land, however, where merriment by no means always implies disrespect ; and who are so extensively used to exorcise the evil spirits from the home on New Year's Day. All of this popularity is enjoyed by these seven happy gods in spite of the fact that, though nominally a Buddhist group, only two of them are of Buddhist origin ; while of the rest there are two of Brahman, two of Taoist and one of Shinto origin.

So far as the differences between Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism are recognized, however, Shinto is the cult for the living, Buddhism for the dead, and Confucianism is the moral code. For worldly prosperity people pray to the Shinto household idols or at the Shinto shrines ; for things pertaining to the dead, or to the prospect of death and the future life, they pray to the Buddhist idols and go to the Buddhist temples ; for moral guidance they study the literature of Confucianism. Neither

Shinto nor Buddhism has for the Japanese any definite ethical import ; that belongs entirely to Confucianism.

Practically, therefore, all Japanese are Buddhists. The forty-two million people of Japan can properly be added to the Buddhist column though they must at the same time be placed also in the Shinto and Confucian columns. But this means much less than saying that all Japanese are received into the Buddhist community by a formal ceremony resembling those by which monks, novices and lay-members were received into the Order in the early history of the faith. There is no ceremony of admission into Buddhism in Japan, except for priests, as they are now properly called, rather than monks. Nor does it mean that all Japanese are believers in Buddhism, for there is no formal profession of faith. It means rather that the Japanese are born into Buddhism, and, especially, that they die in Buddhism. When a child is born it is registered in, and is looked upon as belonging to,

the temple in whose vicinity it is born. By way of preparation for death people go to the temples and under the direction of the priests endeavor to acquire merit. At death itself Buddhism has much to do. The cemeteries are controlled by the priests, the granting of whose privileges is one of their sources of revenue. The evil spirits which are always supposed to congregate about a corpse must be dispelled by the priests. The funeral ceremony must be conducted by priests, in whose hands the safe passage of the spirit through the realm of shades is supposed to be to a large extent lodged. Lastly, prayers for the dead must be said by the priests. The tendency of Japanese Buddhism, even more than that of original Buddhism, has been democratic. There is a decided disposition toward a doctrine of universal salvation. Originally it was very difficult to become a Buddha, but under Japanese Buddhism it became very different. Theoretically, indeed, it is held that there are two main states into which people may

enter at death : the state of the good, who immediately enter paradise and become *hotoké*, or Buddhas ; and the state of the wicked, who must pass through a long series of transmigrations yet, some of which may take them through the bodies of animals or the state of demons in hell. Practically, however, all people may become *hotoké* when they die, especially with the help of the priests. They may be obliged to linger in some intermediate state, or purgatory, for a while, but they can be delivered by prayers and offerings. When, therefore, a person dies priests are called, as many as the family can afford, who set up the tablet bearing the new name of the dead. For, just as an individual on being born into the present state receives a new name, so birth into the next world requires a repetition of the process. Incense is then burned before the tablet and prayers are intoned. For seven successive days after the funeral the priests come to the house of the deceased to burn more incense and to say more prayers before the tablet, and after

that they come once a week for a year. When the stage is reached when the deceased is supposed to have entered paradise and become a *hotoké*, or Buddha, the prayers may not yet cease. For the *hotoké* is a supernatural being, a deity, who needs to be honored accordingly. The priests must offer food to the *hotoké*, or spirit of the departed, and give him news about the home from which he went forth. Not only, however, is devotion to the dead a matter of the priests; the relatives also visit the temple at which the dead is buried, on the monthly recurrence of the date of death, for the first year, and on the anniversary of the death after that. The object of these visits is, first, to serve the dead by bringing him food and flowers; secondly, to pray that he may be truly born into paradise; and, thirdly, to pray that the dead may keep in peace and prosperity the house from which he departed. All these acts of the relatives, of course, take place under the direction of the priests.

Though nearly the whole population of Japan is Buddhist, it is in

large part only so in name. The people of the country may be divided into three classes on the question of their relation to the faith. There is first the class of the religiously indifferent or sceptical. They have nothing further to do with Buddhism than to have their dead buried and perhaps also prayed for by the priests. A large proportion of those who are to-day crowding the government colleges and the two imperial universities, or who have gone forth from these institutions, belong to this class; they have no religion. There is a second class who, though they have no positive faith in Buddhism, yet give alms to the mendicants, support the temples, and occasionally pray to the idols, as a mere matter of decency, or with a vague idea of being on the safe side by so doing. And there is a third class consisting of those who endeavor to fulfil their religious duties regularly as prescribed by the priests. These worship their household gods faithfully. They visit the temples regularly. They show the spirits of

their dead all due reverence. They worship, besides the seven gods of happiness, the images of Amida, the Eternal ; Kwannon, the goddess of mercy ; Hachiman, the god of war ; Dharma, the god of wisdom ; and others, according to the customs of the place in which they have been reared or the particular sect under whose influence they happen to be. A general idea that prevails is that it is good policy to be on friendly terms with all deities, so that the traveller often stops to make his obeisance before a wayside idol or at a wayside shrine without asking any questions as to the character or relationship of the god he is thus honoring.

What proportion these three classes hold to each other it is difficult to tell with any degree of accuracy. There are no statistics on the subject. There is much reason to believe, however, that the class of the strictly faithful is not the largest, and that it consists mainly of the very ignorant and of people who have retired from the active duties of life. Altogether, the

impression that the situation makes upon the mind of the observer is that the day has come when the ancient religion sits lightly upon the Japanese heart. The Japanese still goes to the temple, but often only out of tender feelings for the dead. He keeps his idols in the house, but often largely as a matter of good luck, or custom, or even ornamentation; for in general the idols of Buddhism do not partake of the hideous character that has characterized the images of other idolatrous religions; the colossal image of Buddha at Kamakura has won high praise as a work of art. Alms to mendicants are often mere acts of commiseration. Gifts to temples, posted up as they always are in conspicuous places, may be shrewd business advertisements or bids for political favors. Pilgrimages to famous sacred mountains or shrines often possess to a large extent the character of pleasant summer outings, such as might furnish inviting themes for some Japanese Chaucer. The *matsuri*, or religious festivals, held at almost every temple several

times a year, are jolly religious picnics, which are often enlivened by very amusing theatrical performances, resembling possibly the miracle plays of European mediæval history. So far as knowledge of their religion is concerned, there is among the common people a woful lack. There is no reading of sacred literature in the house, no teaching of religion to the young. Even the more educated know little about the specific doctrines of the faith. The large body of the people only believe that they will go to paradise and become *hotoké* when they die; they talk about worshipping this or that idol as a means of securing this or that end, just as people talk about the comparative merits of this or that medicine for the cure of this or that disease; and they perform certain acts, such as repeating the formula, "*Namu Amida Butsu*," to secure merit and help toward entrance into paradise.

That the existence of superstitions should be another feature of such a state of things is not surprising. A great deal of trouble is occasioned

the Japanese by evil spirits. In front of many a Japanese gate stands the beautiful holly tree; it is there to keep the demons out. When a dead body is carried out of a home the floor is quickly swept after it; it is the sweeping out of the evil spirits. Sick people are often supposed to be possessed of demons, sometimes in the form of foxes, badgers or cats, and it is one of the functions of the priest to exorcise them. To find a suitable day for a wedding is exceedingly difficult, owing to the existence of a very large number of unlucky days. Altogether, superstition in Japan has been well described as a vast undergrowth which it is as impossible to classify as to account for.

Let us turn now from the people to the priests. First of all, it is to be noted that the priests in Japanese Buddhism no longer occupy the important place proportionately that the monks did in early Buddhism. There are only about 100,000 Buddhist priests in Japan to a population of forty-two millions. Still they occupy an important position.

Most references to Buddhism in the secular or religious press are references, in fact, to the priesthood. What of the priests, then? So far as their doctrinal views go, it can be said in general that while Japanese Buddhism is "polytheism for the unshorn" it is "pantheism for the shorn." That is, there is in Japanese Buddhism an exoteric teaching for the people and an esoteric teaching for the priests, and the esoteric form is above all things pantheistic. As to particular doctrines the priests hold what has been handed down to them by the tradition of their respective sects. As to general intelligence the state of things is far from ideal. There are schools now for the education of candidates for the priesthood, as there were not in the early days of Buddhism. But the result is not the improvement that might have been expected. The general intellectual condition of Japanese Buddhist priests is shamefully low. There are, indeed, notable exceptions to this statement, of which such names as those of Nanjo, Inouye,

Murakami and Nakanishi stand as guarantees. There are men among the Buddhists who have traveled extensively in Occidental countries and who hold degrees from some of the best universities of Europe. But about the generality of the priests there is much complaint, not only by the secular, press, but even by Buddhist periodicals themselves. The dissatisfaction is not only with the ignorance, but also with the immorality of the priests. Priests frequent prostitute quarters or keep harlots in the temples. A high priest of the greater of the two branches of the Shin sect—a sect which above all others has stood for morality—who died a few years ago kept, besides his own wife, a number of concubines, and the story is told that once a Japanese father journeyed many miles to bring his extraordinarily lovely daughter to the Japanese pope as a gift, and returned to his home filled with life-long joy that his offering had been condescendingly accepted. Even the government itself in 1895 felt impelled to issue a warning on the

subject of the ignorance, the indolence and the immorality of the Buddhist priesthood.

The occupation of the priests, far from being that of the early monks, is well described by the one word—priestcraft. The ceremonies over the dead are a cunningly devised scheme to filch money from the pockets of the people. The selling of prayers and charms, the practice of blessing certain objects and of exorcising evil spirits, are all inventions with the same end in view. Their methods savor so strongly of trickery that to a very wide extent the respect of the people has been totally forfeited. Much of their time is spent in sheer idleness. Preaching or pastoral visitation are scarcely dreamt of, except by the priests of the Shin sect, who are to a limited extent in the habit of delivering discourses to their people. Taking into consideration all these things and many more that might be added, the conviction forces itself upon one that, while there are many men of intelligence and character among the Japanese Buddhist priests

of to-day, the life of the great body of them is such as to be to the people of Japan not a blessing but a curse.

To sum up, then: Considering the lack of religious fervor among the people and the low intellectual, moral and spiritual status of the priesthood, it is not too much to say that Japanese Buddhism is a decaying faith. Intelligent Buddhists themselves declare that unless the religion can be reformed it is doomed.

III. Japan owes much to Buddhism. It was under the influence of Buddhism that her civilization grew up. For a thousand years Buddhism was at work silently, patiently, persistently inculcating that gentleness, that peculiar kindness, that extreme regard for life, that boundless courtesy which have made the Japanese people famous. Harsh speech and rough, excited action are highly repulsive to Japanese feelings. There are Buddhist priests who still will swing a brush before them when they walk, so that no insects may be left in their path to be crushed by their feet. Japanese

etiquette is not mere hollow ceremony, as has been charged ; there is much genuine politeness underneath it all.

Buddhism fostered education. When there were no other schools, excepting, perhaps, the training schools for the young *samurai*, or warriors, Buddhist priests whiled away the tedium of their monotonous lives by gathering in the children of the neighborhood and teaching them to read and write. The monasteries were often the only place where libraries were to be found. The native alphabet was brought into general use through the priests. Printing and the circulation of literature received much encouragement from them.

Moreover, Buddhism called into play the æsthetic activities of the people. Buddhism, in its highly polytheistic form, fed the imagination of the people and furnished many subjects for the art which gradually arose under its influence. The striking fondness for flowers, as well as for the beauties of landscape scenery, are probably not uncon-

nected with the teaching of him the favorite seat of whose images is the beautiful lotus flower.

In its polytheistic modifications Buddhism, through long centuries, sustained the religious instincts of the people of Japan. Between Shinto and Buddhism the latter is far superior as a religion, and so far as it displaced the former it conferred upon Japan a positive benefit. In its highest form, that of the Shin sect, it is a decided and remarkable "feeling after God" and a vast preparation toward finding Him.

On the other hand, when one contemplates the totality of the effects of this caricature of religion upon the life of so large and gifted a portion of the human race as the Japanese nation is, the impression can not be other than that of melancholy and unspeakable havoc. While Buddhism was kind to animals it was often cruel to men. It is largely responsible for the existence of the *eta*, the pariahs of Japan. Its political influence, while generally peaceable, was destructive of the national spirit. And it was not

always for peace ; often it instigated internal strife. It kept woman relegated to a position of unnatural inferiority. It palsied the aspirations of men, and trained them into a state of hopeless resignation and of widespread fatalism which grew out of its inexorable law of cause and effect. The very temple bells, hung low as they are, instead of pealing forth the glad notes of joy and faith and hope, send abroad the low, melancholy sounds of a gloomy pessimism. "Sad as a temple bell," is a Japanese saying. The little music that is heard is all in the minor key. With pessimism pantheism is linked. "How can you worship idols?" you ask the priest who has studied at Oxford. "God is in everything ; He is in images ; images are helpful representations to the common mind ; therefore we use them." Of the prevalence of pantheism the loss of that greatest essential to a man's being a man, namely, a sense of personality, has been a consequence. An indistinct sense of personality implies the loss of the key to the whole fabric of

higher truth. Japanese Buddhism has thus, not indeed to the same extent as original Buddhism would have done, but still to a profound degree, robbed the people of Japan of their self-consciousness, of their sense of individuality, and of their appreciation of individual worth and individual responsibility. And it has, not indeed, as completely as original Buddhism would have done, but still to an appalling extent, atrophied their God-consciousness, and hardened them in their abnormal state of mind. To sum up all, under the influence of a thousand years of Buddhism, the Japanese spiritual nature has suffered amazing distortion, and it has become fixed and hardened in this distortion.

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